



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

April 14, 2006

Dorcas R. Hardy, Chairman
White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee
4350 East West Highway, 3rd Floor
Bethesda, MD 20814

Re: New Mexico Activity Summary
in relation to WHCOA Resolutions

Dear Ms. Hardy:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the preliminary report and resolutions generated by the delegates of the White House Conference on Aging. The conference, which occurs only once a decade, was a historic event and one of great importance, particularly considering the aging of the Baby Boomers. New Mexico's representation was coordinated by Secretary Debbie Armstrong of New Mexico's Aging and Long-Term Services Department (ALTSD).

New Mexico is projected to be one of the fastest growing states in the per capita ratio of persons over age sixty-five. It is therefore critical that New Mexico address the needs of seniors, particularly those who are the most isolated, frail or vulnerable given our challenges with New Mexico's rate of poverty and the uninsured. To this end we have undertaken a number of initiatives in New Mexico to address the needs and concerns of seniors and to prepare our state for the future aging population.

The following is a summary of where New Mexico stands in relation to the 50 resolutions passed by the WHCOA delegates. Our comments are organized by the categories established by the Planning Committee with resolutions referenced according to their ranking number.

Planning Along the Lifespan

- New Mexico is very concerned about maintaining the integrity of the social security system, including the SSI and SSDI programs. Having a secure income for the most needy is critical. New Mexico supports Resolutions #11, #30 and #41.

community service employment program. As mentioned above, New Mexico also supports the proposed Elder Justice Act.

- Housing and transportation are critical components of the infrastructure needed to meet Olmstead requirements and fully support home and community-based long term care initiatives for seniors and adults with disabilities, as well as to support persons with behavioral health needs. Both have been identified as high priorities in New Mexico. Last year a Housing Trust Fund was created to expand affordable housing opportunities and assist persons with disabilities to obtain housing. In regard to transportation, New Mexico is initiating a "United We Ride" pilot program and plans to establish a Transit Fund to assist local communities in obtaining vehicles to build public transportation capacity.

Health and Long Term Living

- Health and long-term living are some of the most critical areas of concern as we face the aging of America and one in which we have placed great emphasis. New Mexico is currently second in the nation in its investment of public funding in home and community-based long term care versus institutional care – and we will do more to strengthen this system even further. New Mexico is in the process of implementing a self-directed waiver program with support from a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Cash & Counseling grant. I have also signed into law the Money Follows the Person Act to support community reintegration. In addition, New Mexico has a second RWJ grant to support the development of a comprehensive coordinated long term care system. New Mexico strongly supports Resolutions #2 and #7.
- New Mexico is also leading the nation in the development of a unique and innovative behavioral health system that integrates all publicly funded behavioral health programs. Funding is pooled across departments, managed by a single statewide entity and overseen by a statutorily created behavioral health purchasing collaborative made up of 17 state agencies. ALTSD plays a significant role in the Collaborative and, through this unique system, the behavioral health issues of substance abuse and depression among older adults is now being addressed more effectively. New Mexico supports Resolution #8 to address these issues.
- Workforce issues in health and long term care are significant in New Mexico. Already there is a shortage of adequate numbers of direct caregivers and trained geriatric professionals. This situation will only get worse as the aging population grows. It is ironic that, while two of the top ten resolutions relate to geriatric workforce, Federal funding for New Mexico's only geriatric education center was eliminated. To better address a broad range of needs in workforce training and education, New Mexico created a Cabinet-level Department of Higher Education. Healthcare, behavioral health and geriatric education will be some of the targeted areas for educational development. New Mexico supports Resolutions #6 and #9.
- New Mexico also supports the resolutions addressing the health issues of disease management (#21), nutrition (#22), rural access (#23), evidence-based practice (#29),

health disparities (#34), end-of-life care (#35), disease prevention (#37), disabilities (#44) and patient advocacy (#49).

- New Mexico strongly supports the resolution to ensure care for Veterans (#32). New Mexico has one of the only Cabinet departments in the country dedicated to Veterans. New Mexico also has a Cabinet department dedicated to Native American issues and relations and I am deeply disappointed that the unique needs and status of Native Americans were not recognized in a specific resolution.
- Strengthening and improving Medicare and Medicaid are also extremely important to New Mexico. In particular, the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit needs to be simplified. I will not attempt in this review of WHCOA resolutions to outline all my recommendations for Medicare and Medicaid. Suffice it to say that the needs of an aging population cannot be adequately addressed without paying significant attention to the strengthening of these two critically important programs. That being said, New Mexico supports Resolutions #4, #5 and #50.

Civic and Social Engagement

- Like many areas of the country, New Mexico is starting to see a decline in volunteerism. However, New Mexico has a relatively new but active Commission on Volunteerism, which has just adopted a "Blue Print for Civic Engagement." ALTSD provides a broad range of opportunities for older volunteers, including the LTC Ombudsman program, SHIP counselors (benefits counseling), Medicare Fraud Patrol project, Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, RSVP and an innovative intergenerational program that provides mentorship to young TANF clients and teens in foster care. New Mexico supports Resolutions #25 and #28.

Technology and Innovation in an Emerging Senior/Boomer Marketplace

- To support the integration of health and aging services to improve access and quality, New Mexico is developing an integrated health and human services IT system. Specifically, a web-accessible statewide social service resource directory is under development, as is an integrated eligibility system. Both efforts will allow for the further development of Aging and Disability Resource Centers and "one-stop" or "single point-of-entry" systems to streamline processes for improved access and coordination of services. New Mexico supports Resolution #19.

Cross-Cutting Resolutions

- New Mexico has a strong commitment to integrated, collaborative delivery systems. We are advancing such system design in our behavioral health system, as well as health and aging.
- To further the goal of integrated systems, I realigned State programs through the elevation of the former State Agency on Aging to a Cabinet-level department called the Aging and Long Term Services Department (ALTSD) and the transfer to ALTSD of Medicaid and State-funded home and community-based long term care programs, as well as Adult Protective Services. Transfer of additional long-term care programs, including

Independent Living Centers and Developmentally Disability services, is under consideration. New Mexico supports Resolutions #10 and #46.

- Given the projected shortage of an adequate workforce, New Mexico also supports the development of strategies for expanding support of informal caregivers – Resolution #13.

Finally, I support Resolution #17 to implement a strategy and plan to sustain the momentum, public visibility and oversight of the implementation of the 2005 WHCOA resolutions. These are critically important issues for states and I welcome further dialogue and partnership in addressing the needs of our aging citizens.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Bill Richardson
Governor

BR/mw

cc Debbie Armstrong, Secretary, NM Aging and Long Term Services Department
Michelle R. Welby, Health Policy Advisory